

## Interview with Harry Fleishman

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project  
Labor Series

HARRY FLEISCHMAN

Interviewed by: Morris Weisz

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*Q: [This is Morris Weisz; today is January 27, 1992; and I am] interviewing Harry Fleischman [for the Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project] about his work with the United States Information Agency (USIA). Harry Fleischman, who is now retired, worked in the early 1950s for the Voice of America. Harry, why don't you begin by telling us what you did before working for USIA?*

FLEISCHMAN: Well, I was formerly an organizer for the Young People's Socialist League in 1934 and 1935; National Secretary of the Red Falcons of America, which was a Socialist children's organization in the United States in 1936; and later an organizer for the Socialist Party in Illinois and Indiana from 1939 to 1942; then National Secretary of the Socialist Party from 1942 to 1950. In between, I also had a stint as an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union in Detroit and Michigan at the time of the sit-down strikes in 1937 and 1938, so that I was involved with them and with the people in the United Auto Workers like [the Reuthers], not so much Walter Reuther, but much more with his brothers Vic and Roy. Roy was a particularly close friend as was his wife Fania, whom I knew very well.

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My activity with the Socialist Party included being the Campaign Manager for Norman Thomas' last two campaigns for President in 1944 and 1948, and there were a lot of activities that occurred that are of interest, but we can't get into them now. One of these things, however, was that after the election of 1948, both Norman Thomas and I and a majority of the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party felt that the Socialist Party should stop running its own candidates and work within the old parties, primarily within the Democratic Party, openly as an educational force to try to bring the Socialist ideas to where the masses of workers were, which was in the Democratic Party. At the 1950 Convention of the Socialist Party, our proposals were defeated by a heavy majority of the delegation. I am not sure of the exact numbers, something like 64 to 42. The exact numbers are in the biography of Norman Thomas that I wrote [Norman Thomas, A Biography ] and that was published by W.W. Norton [Inc. New York in 1964. A paperback edition was published in 1967, and after Norman Thomas died in 1968, an updated edition was published in 1969.] However, when we lost at the Convention, I immediately resigned as National Secretary and then remembered that I had to get a job, because I had not been looking for a job even though it had seemed very obvious that we were going to lose at the Convention. Since by then I had two children, it became even more important that I find a job in a hurry. Initially I received some assignments running a conference for the Jewish Labor Committee on "Jewish Labor Fights Communism." I ran the conference and then also put out a pamphlet describing the conference, telling what people had to say.

*Q: Harry, please describe the Jewish Labor Committee and your relationship to trade unions?*

FLEISCHMAN: Right. Well, the Jewish Labor Committee was an organization set up initially by the needle-trades unions and the Jewish led part of the American labor movement in the early 1930s to help in the fight against the Nazis and, when the war came, also against the Fascists in Italy and against Japan. It helped bring more and more workers to support these struggles and also to press for specifically Jewish issues, like

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the fight against discrimination against Jews in employment, in school quotas, and in all sorts of areas. It had the attitude, which is one that I have always had too, that to support the rights of the Jews in the United States, you had to support all minorities and to work for social justice on every front. So it was natural that I should be working with them, but they didn't have any [permanent] job available at that time. I also wrote a pamphlet of questions and answers about Communism for the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which was another Jewish agency that worked on discrimination.

Then there were questions about getting a job with some government agency, and I remember that at that time one of the people that I contacted was you, Murray, who had certain ideas about jobs that might be possible including one, if I recall correctly, with the CIA, because you felt that there were some people in the CIA who were very soft on Communism, and that it might be useful for me to be there. Well, I did go to see. . .

*Q: What's the date of this thing? I don't remember it.*

FLEISCHMAN: This was in 1950. Cord Meyer was the Assistant Director or the Deputy Director of the CIA. He had been a liberal and you thought that this was a useful thing. I went and saw one of the people from the CIA at one of those barracks buildings that they had in Washington at the time. You know, the temporary offices. After talking with the person there, I felt that this was really not a job that I could take. As my wife Natalie put it, "How could you be in a job where you couldn't tell people what you are doing?" It's true, that I am a person who is very apt to talk about the things I am doing, and it would have been a rather difficult kind of thing for me.

*Q: This is a pleasant surprise to me. I didn't know that I knew about the CIA. How did you get in there? What did you do?*

FLEISCHMAN: You set it up. I don't know how. I didn't know anybody there.

*Q: Well, I'll take your word for it.*

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FLEISCHMAN: Other than that, there were a couple of other possibilities that presented themselves. One was with regard to becoming a Labor Attach# [in the Department of State] or Labor Information Officer [in the United States Information Agency], and the other was with the Voice of America. I remember that I met Jay Lovestone at this time, and Jay, although we had been on different sides on many issues, was very friendly and suggested that it would be wiser to try for the Voice of America rather than Labor Attach# or Labor Information Officer, because he said, "If you are away in India or some place like that, and you get into some kind of trouble, you are far away from people who can be helpful. Whereas if you work at the Voice of America right here in New York or in Washington, you have a lot of people around who would be willing to be helpful." I thought that [advice] made a certain kind of sense and decided to try for the Voice of America. What happened next was that I called Liston Oak, who was the Labor Editor at the Voice of America, and went up to see him in New York.

*Q: The Voice [of America] was then in New York?*

FLEISCHMAN: The main offices were in New York. There were some offices in Washington but most of them were in New York City. Liston had formerly been an editor of The New Masses, then broke with the Communists and became editor of The New Leader, a Social Democratic publication. He was at this time working for the government as Labor Editor for the Voice. When I went up to see Liston, he said, "Well, you come at a very good time. I am about to go on vacation for four weeks. Would you be willing to write my script while I am gone." So I said, "Sure," and wrote scripts on labor activities.

*Q: Was this on contract or were you hired as a [regular] employee?*

FLEISCHMAN: At that time, "on contract" to do the scripts, and I did them. In the meantime, Norman Thomas spoke to Elmer Davis, who had been the head of the Office of War Information during World War II, and Elmer thought it would a great idea for me to get

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to the Voice. I had met Elmer Davis as a fellow-correspondent in 1948 at the Convention of the Progressive Party.

But let me digress a moment. In the 1948 [Presidential] election campaign, I had called Palmer Hoyt, Publisher of the Denver Post and suggested to him that Norman Thomas write daily columns from the Democratic, Republican and Henry Wallace conventions. He said, "Good idea! I'll get back to you in a few days." Within a few hours, he called back and said, "Great! Let's do it." And he set up a syndicate of some 14 papers throughout the country that carried these articles. I went along with Norman as his leg man. At each of these conventions, I arranged for him to speak on radio and television programs about 100 times, while we were doing this other work.

At the Henry Wallace Convention, the Progressive Party Convention, which was controlled by the Communists, a strange thing happened. Henry Wallace had written some letters to a guy by the name of Nicholas Roerick, whom he addressed as "My dear Guru." Westbrook Pegler, a right-wing Hearst columnist, had gotten a hold of this and had printed some of the letters in his paper. At this press conference which Henry Wallace had, Doris Gleeson, who was a liberal columnist from the New York Post asked Henry Wallace about the "Guru letters," and he replied, "I will not reply to any questions from Westbrook Pegler or any of his ilk." There was a gasp from the audience, because they all knew that Doris Gleeson was a person who was a liberal. Nevertheless, H.L. Mencken then got up, and said, "Mr. Wallace, you know that I am not a Westbrook Peglerite." "Oh, no, Mr. Mencken, I know." "I don't really care about it too much, but since the matter has come up, what about the 'Guru letters.'" Again, Wallace refused to answer. Then Westbrook Pegler got up and asked the [same] question, and again Wallace refused to answer. Then Elmer Davis got up and said, "Mr. Wallace, you have been. . ."

*Q: Excuse me, let me interrupt you and ask you where was Elmer Davis at this point? Was he a correspondent?*

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FLEISCHMAN: He was a correspondent.

*Q: He was no longer with the OWI [Office of War Information]?*

FLEISCHMAN: Oh, no. He was a radio correspondent, and he asked Henry Wallace, "You have talked about debating candidates. Are you willing to debate Norman Thomas?" Henry Wallace said, "Well, I don't think that that would be a worthwhile use of my time." So then I got up, and said, "Mr. Wallace, in view of your statement about not debating Norman Thomas, do you think that Harry Truman and Tom Dewey would be justified in refusing to debate you on the same grounds?" And he said, "Uh, yes!" It was an amazing thing!

Well, to get back to [my earlier comment], Elmer Davis did suggest that it would be good for me to work for the Voice, and Norman [Thomas] had also arranged an appointment for us with Senator William Benton, who had some connection with that too. Benton immediately sent a letter to the Voice — Foy Kohler was Director of the Voice at that time. He later became Ambassador to the Soviet Union. — urging that the Voice consider hiring me. Well, I was already writing scripts. I wrote to Benton to thank him for having sent this letter. He apparently thought of this as a suggestion for him to write again. He wrote again, and Norman Jacobs, who was head of the unit of the Voice where I [wanted to work], told Liston Oaks, "Please, get him to call off his dogs. It's too much pressure." Well, I stopped that, and I wrote out my formal form 57, and then I was put on what they called, "W.A.E." [status or paid only "when actually employed"], which provided that I would get the same amount of money as I would after I went through the clearance process. But several things happened that kind of screwed things up. It appeared that some people in the State Department — and the Voice of America was part of the State Department at this time in 1950 — were worried that my last job was as the National Secretary of the Socialist Party, and word came down that my application could no longer be processed, but that I could, however, continue working for the Voice as a "W.A.E.," indefinitely.

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*Q: It is interesting to point out that this was in 1950 before McCarthyism began, but the defensive attitude of the Truman Administration was such that they were trying to avoid any possibility of being criticized for supporting radicals of any type.*

FLEISCHMAN: Right. Now at this point I have to go back a little further, because while I was still National Secretary of the Socialist Party, both Norman Thomas and I had been in touch with Foy Kohler about a suggested off-the-record conference at the Voice of America on Soviet imperialism with various experts [including] Bertram Wolfe, who later became the Chief of the Ideological Advisory Unit of the Voice, and who had written the book, *Three Who Made a Revolution* and many others. He, Norman and I were among the group that met with the Voice of America people and some others to discuss what was happening and how to counter Soviet imperialism. One of the things that we did was that Norman and I wrote a statement [entitled], "Stalinism is not Socialism," which pointed out how under Stalin the Soviet Union and the Communists had in an imperialistic fashion taken over many countries, whereas the United States had not done anything like that. It was signed not just by the main-stream Socialist Party but by the more conservative Social Democratic Federation as well as the Trotskyist Independent Socialists of the Shachtman group and one or two others. We sent this out to Socialists throughout the world and many of them endorsed it and came out with similar statements including *Jenata*, which was the paper of the Socialist Party of India at that time. I remember that 100,000 copies of that statement were distributed by airplane over Communist China, not that it had any effect!

*Q: [This raises the issue of] use by the US Government of Socialist instruments and Socialist publications. Did you run off the 100,000 copies or was it the US Government?*

FLEISCHMAN: I assume it was the US Government. Certainly I did not.

*Q: So it is an example of the US Government utilizing Socialist propaganda.*

FLEISCHMAN: Oh, of course, and I was completely in favor of that.

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*Q: If you had found out that the CIA had done that, would it have bothered you?*

FLEISCHMAN: Yes, it would have.

*Q: Well, we'll discuss that later.*

FLEISCHMAN: Yes. To [return to the subject of my employment with the Voice of America], when we heard that my application could not be processed any more, a friend of mine, Bernie Englander, went up to the Voice of America office with another friend, Nelson Frank, who wrote for the New York World Telegram and Sun and was the assistant to Fred Woltman there.

*Q: Fred Woltman was the anti-Communist expert.*

FLEISCHMAN: Right, and when he heard this, Nelson Frank said, "I have a friend, Ben Mandel, who is the Assistant to Senator McCarran, and I can talk to him about this and get him to talk to the State Department, and Freddy Woltman can talk to Senator McCarthy." I gulped several times at this and said, "Well, please don't do anything yet," and I called Foy Kohler and told him that "the State Department seems to be afraid to hire me, because I am a Socialist. They are afraid of McCarran and McCarthy, but it is possible if they don't [hire me], McCarran and McCarthy may raise hell with the State Department. What should I do?" He said, "Don't do anything for 24 hours." He went down to Washington — I assume he had other work there in Washington. — and called up from there that I was cleared. Just like that! This was a weird kind of business, but okay! Then later on I noticed that in the State Department Biographic Registry, they listed me as "Former national secretary of a political party and former editor of a political weekly," which was all right, if that's the way they [wanted it], but they were still scared about it.

But in terms of my work at the Voice of America, I had a marvelous time. It was enjoyable, interesting, and I think very productive, because we had daily meetings at which we would get the anti-American propaganda that the Voice had received and that we would have to



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respond to in one way or another, and we would discuss what kind of stories we wanted to carry. All of that stuff. But we were able to do a lot more than I would have thought possible. The staple product was a labor news round up, which we prepared once a week. It had a lot of items on what was happening in US labor and what was happening in other countries and what was happening in the Soviet Union and its satellites, and we would report on this. We would also do specials, which would be one script maybe three to five pages on one item.

*Q: When you say “we” would do it, were you working for Liston Oak, on his staff, separate from him? What was the relationship?*

FLEISCHMAN: No, each of us wrote separate scripts, and after a while, I became Labor Editor along with Liston. Both of us had the title of Labor Editor. Still later, they made me Political Editor as well, because they wanted me to do various kinds of scripts which I will describe later, but there was, for instance, at that time a coal mine disaster in the United States. So I wrote a script about the disaster telling everything that had happened in the mine and describing the reaction of [various] people: How the unions protested, how the Congress responded to this; and there was action on all fronts to try prevent this kind of thing from happening again. I knew when this went out that radio Moscow would immediately carry scripts about it, and, of course, they did. I was prepared. At the Voice we would get a daily summary of radio speeches, not only over Radio Moscow but from all of the satellite countries as well.

*Q: This is the precursor of what we now call FBIS, the Foreign Broadcasting Information Service.*

FLEISCHMAN: Well, that was it. Anyway, we would get the summary. And so I immediately came back with another script pointing out that in the United States, when we have a coal mine disaster, everybody knows about it immediately, and we take action democratically to deal with it, whereas in the Soviet Union and in the satellites, when there

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is a coal mine disaster, it is a state secret, and anybody who speaks about it is sent to a slave labor camp, and I gave some illustrations of where firemen who responded to these [disasters] were then sent to slave labor camps.

*Q: Where did you get that information?*

FLEISCHMAN: We got that information from refugees who had escaped from the Soviet Union and the satellite countries. There were a lot people around, who were able to give us that kind of information. For instance, the Radio in the American Sector, RIAS, in Berlin, had [access to] 50 to 100 people coming daily from East Germany reporting on what conditions were like and what things they had heard, so we had a significant number. This was before the Berlin Wall went up [on August 13, 1961] and that was the kind of useful information that we gave. Radio Moscow then dropped the issue of the American coal mine disaster cold, when we came forward with out facts. We would do that kind of thing regularly.

*Q: Let me interrupt to ask about something that become important later on. You felt free to prepare these scripts about things that went wrong in the labor field in the United States. To what degree were you permitted, encouraged, or just allowed on your own to report differences between the American trade union movement and the Government, where the trade union movement criticized the Government? For instance in mine strikes or something like that?*

FLEISCHMAN: I felt free to do that, and as a matter of fact, it was encouraged. One of the things that happened that was extremely interesting was I interviewed a lot of rank and file workers in different industries, and one of the things that I was warned about was simply to be careful not to paint too rosy a picture of the life of American workers, because (1) it would not be believed, and (2) it would create a great deal of envy. So the thing that we tried to do all the time was to carry a balanced picture of what was going on in American labor.

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*Q: How did this encouragement take place? Was there an instruction? Or just the feeling around the office?*

FLEISCHMAN: The feeling around the office. The Head of the unit, Edwin Kretzmann, would say that this is a really good script. Norman Jacobs, who was the Head of the unit that wrote all of these scripts — We had the religious scripts, the labor scripts, international . . . All kinds.

*Q: Is he the fellow who later became the Editor of The New Leader?*

FLEISCHMAN: Right. And he would write down on the copy of my script “Great script” or something indicating that this is what they liked. We also did a lot that was strongly anti-Communist. For instance, when a group of American Communist leaders were sentenced to prison but were offered release if they would instead go to the Soviet Union, and they all declined to do it, I wrote a script called, “The Case of the Reluctant Salesmen,” which pointed out that they had refused to go to the Soviet Union, saying, “Perhaps they were very wise,” and then I listed the members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from the beginning and how many of them had been killed, how many of the people in various other aspects of Soviet life had been destroyed, people of the Communist central organizations, so that it was much more dangerous to be a Communist leader in the Soviet Union than it was to be [a Communist leader] in the United States.

*Q: These were the prosecutions of the Communists under the Smith Act?*

FLEISCHMAN: Yes.

*Q: Later declared unconstitutional.*

FLEISCHMAN: Right. But these were among the things we would do. When Berthold Brecht wrote an opera. . . — He was a pro-Communist writer in East Germany. He wrote

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operas and plays and songs. — He was attacked by the East German Government, because his play was too pacifist. Another chap at the Voice, Howard Maier, who wrote little dramatic skits and I put out one addressed to Bert Brecht, because I remembered a song that Bert had written. It goes, “You must be ready to take over. You must be ready to take over. Don't hesitate to ask questions, comrades. Don't be persuaded but see for yourself,” etc. So we played that song back to East Germany and then [told] Bert, “You're still right. You ought to be telling them what's in your song.” And that was the kind of thing that we could do.

*Q: He, of course, wrote “The Three Penny Opera.”*

FLEISCHMAN: Right. We had a great deal of freedom to do these kinds of things. I started a series once called, “Popular Songs with a Labor Flavor.” I took union songs, work songs, popular songs that had some kind of work connotation like, “The Shrimp Boats are Coming” and “The Gandy Dancer's Ball” and I interviewed Paul Weston, who had written those two songs. He told how his father had been a gandy dancer, a man who works on the railroad fixing the railroad ties, and about his activities with the union.

*Q: All of these things, Harry, served the interests of the United States Government's foreign policy. Were you ever cautioned about not doing something because it did not serve the [interests] or ran counter to US Government policy? Honestly?*

FLEISCHMAN: I'm trying to think of it. I had problems with some things, but it wasn't because of that. No, even talking about strikes and union criticism of the Government were accepted. They felt that these facts had to be told. Foy Kohler, when he was chief of the Voice [of America], was a great leader. He felt that you had to let it all be told and let the chips fall where they may. Later on he left, and they got somebody from Madison Avenue, whose name I can't even remember. He was a weakling, and he very much succumbed to McCarthyism. That will come in a bit later [in the interview]. But when Foy Kohler [was Director], I can't think of anything that happened where there was any problem on that,

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and the atmosphere at the Voice then was a very collegial one. There may have been backbiting between some people. I know I was once called a Stakhanovite, because I wrote too many scripts too quickly, but that was not serious.

What then happened was that I was also asked to write scripts on other subjects. For instance, when our election campaign of 1952 was coming up, they asked me to write a series on the American election system — about primaries, getting on the ballot as a minority party, conventions, the electoral college, all of the things that were part of the American election system, which was of course a very complicated system to try to describe to people abroad.

*Q: Was this series focused specifically on minority parties?*

FLEISCHMAN: No. This series focused on the whole American election system, and since I had been the campaign manager of the Socialist Party, I had knowledge of what a minority party does and was able to get that kind of information into [the scripts], so it gave the full picture.

*Q: Did you give equal attention to a party running candidates which you disagreed with?*

FLEISCHMAN: No, I gave them more unfortunately or fortunately. (Laughter) No, I had to deal with the major parties naturally, but I also described things that made it harder for minority parties to get on the ballot. I gave the full story.

Then came the issue of nuclear energy and nuclear bombs, which would be tested every so often. I was asked to do a series of scripts on the peace time uses of atomic energy, and I did. I wrote scripts about uses in medicine, in irradiated food, which back then and now, were very current and about a whole a variety of such things. One of our old Socialist friends, the scientist Henry Gomberg, a brother of the trade union engineer Bill Gomberg, was in charge of the nuclear program at the University of Michigan. He was the one who had done a good deal on peace time uses, so I interviewed him and got a lot of

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information. Well, after that, every time that the US would have a nuclear test, my scripts were dusted off and used again.

*Q: This took place coincidentally with the Korean War. Did you have anything to do with our coverage of the Korean War?*

FLEISCHMAN: Not very much, because my area was primarily on labor, but there was a bit of it. At this point the Socialist Party and Norman Thomas had supported the Korean War as a United Nations action. We felt that the right thing had been done. In 1950, I was asked by the State Department to write a statement which would go to the White House on the question of international disarmament and Norman wrote a similar one to Harry Truman directly, in which we urged Truman to speak out at the fifth anniversary of the UN's founding on October 24, 1950, and call for universal disarmament and use of the funds [thereby] saved for peace time purposes: for schools, houses, food, etc.

*Q: You say you were asked by the State Department. Was this while you were a Government employee?*

FLEISCHMAN: No, this was before I went to work for the Voice. Somebody from the State Department, Cleon Swayzee, asked me to do it. I wrote that [statement], and Norman wrote [a statement at the same time]. We hadn't talked about it before, but each of us wrote virtually the same thing. [President] Truman wrote back to Norman thanking him for his letter and urging him to listen to his speech, because "I think you will like it." And he gave a speech which covered the points that we had made. Unfortunately the war in South Korea created a different atmosphere, so that there wasn't the opportunity to really push for this effectively. But, yes, Truman was very receptive to this kind of thing, and he became very friendly with Norman Thomas after that. One time there was a dinner honoring Truman [given by] the Italian-American Labor Council. Norman was there, and Truman insisted on calling him over, so that their picture could be taken together. They had quite a rapport at that time.

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Well, all kinds of these [subjects were covered in] my scripts, and I was writing about slave labor in the Soviet Union and in the satellites, when something that the Workers' Defense League had started really came up.

*Q: Hold on a minute. I am going to ask you to describe the Workers' Defense League in a moment, but you said you were writing things on slave labor. Were these [based on] information gathered from people who had run away or escaped?*

FLEISCHMAN: Right, from former slave laborers.

*Q: Since you are going to get into the Workers' Defense League, please describe it.*

FLEISCHMAN: The Workers' Defense League is an organization that was set up in 1936 to promote the defense of workers, organized and unorganized. At that time unions were very poor, and they needed a lot of help from outside. It was started by Norman Thomas and David Clendenin, Frances Heisler, Max Delson and a few other people as an organization that could be helpful.

*Q: Chiefly in the legal field?*

FLEISCHMAN: Particularly in the legal field. It dealt with cases of debt peonage in the South among farm workers and share croppers and succeeded in getting some plantation owners convicted and sent to jail. In 1949 the League set up a Commission of Inquiry into Forced Labor around the world. This commission included people like the Rev. John Haynes Holmes, Harry Gideonse, who was the President of Brooklyn College, Norman Thomas of course, and a lot of other people. Frank Graham, President of the University of North Carolina. (End of Side A, Tape One)

The Workers' Defense League in 1949 started a Commission of Inquiry into Forced Labor, which dealt with forced labor not only in the Soviet areas but in South Africa and the Arab states and debt peonage in the South of the United States. It was a very

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successful conference. Albert Herling of the Workers' Defense League ran these hearings and [later wrote] a very good book on The Red Slave Empire, but even more important, the AFL, which found this WDL inquiry had been a very useful one, [decided] to get the United Nations' International Labor Organization to hold similar hearings. It took time for that to eventuate, but finally in early 1952, there were hearings at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and I was sent there by the Voice as their chief correspondent to cover those hearings.

*Q: Was there any effort made by the Soviets to stop the hearings at the UN?*

FLEISCHMAN: No, this was the ILO [holding the hearings] rather than the United Nations itself.

*Q: The Soviets had not yet returned to the ILO.*

FLEISCHMAN: That's right. Sometimes they got themselves into trouble by such absences, like with the Korean business, by walking out of the United Nations Security Council. Okay. So I was the main correspondent for that. Then the ILO set up hearings of their own, the Commission of Inquiry on Forced Labor, in Geneva in the fall of 1952, and I was sent over by the Voice to cover that. Before arriving in Geneva, I stopped in London, Paris, Munich and Berlin to meet with former slave laborers who would be coming to testify in Geneva. The Geneva hearings were held in camera; they were secret, so I couldn't attend the hearings, but what I did was to arrange for almost all of the witnesses at the hearings to be interviewed by me and by two colleagues from the Voice whom I had picked up in Munich, where they were working. One of them was from Lithuania, the other was from Latvia. They had both been active in the Social Democratic movements in those countries and between them they spoke nine languages. So when we interviewed the witnesses, we could interview them in their own languages, which could then be broadcast immediately. I would write the scripts in English and phone them back to Munich.



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*Q: That was back in the days before the fax [machine].*

FLEISCHMAN: Right. I phoned the scripts back to Munich, and then the scripts would be phoned on the WATS line of the US Government to New York to the VOA, which saved about \$50 a day for each of these broadcasts, which otherwise would have had to go by cable. So that saved about \$2,500 for the Voice, and when I got home, I urged the Voice to use that system from then on. I never got an answer to that memo, but okay! The scripts were very interesting and I got word from the New York office that they were being used very widely. The Voice had about 40 or more language units, and each language desk could select what they wanted from the scripts that were offered to them. They used mine very heavily, because it fit in very well.

*Q: Were these hearings related only to the Soviet Union or also to South Africa and other areas where slave labor was found?*

FLEISCHMAN: It included the Africans as well as the Arabs as well as the Soviet Union. I wrote scripts on everything [to do with] the world of slave labor. Unfortunately these guys [the witnesses at the ILO hearings] were real prisoners of slave labor. I wrote on all of these aspects, and when I got back, the Voice was very pleased with the reception and all the things that had happened on that.

My whole trip [to Europe] was about six weeks [with] about one month in Geneva, and the other two weeks traveling in advance. I also went back to Paris to meet with the USIA editors there to indicate to them how they could write articles most effectively from the scripts that I had been pouring out. While there I met a lot of my old friends who were with the Marshall Plan. That included you, Bill Kemsley, Bill Gausmann, and Amicus Most, who was there for something on E.C.A.

*Q: Paul Porter?*

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FLEISCHMAN: Paul wasn't there. I think, he was in Germany at that time. I did see Phil Heller.

*Q: He may have been in Greece.*

FLEISCHMAN: Yes, I think it was Greece. That's right. I met with Phil Heller in Berlin, and went through RIAS, the Radio in the American Sector, and they showed me how they had people coming over from East Germany and reporting what was happening there. I also met Mayor Ernst Reuter at that time, and when I flew from Frankfurt to Berlin, what happened was that. . . This was while the Soviets were still buzzing the American planes. This was during the [Berlin Air Lift, when] we were bringing fuel and food and everything in by this plane lift. And the pilot said, "I hope we have a quiet trip this time," which we did.

But when I went to see the former slave laborers in Eastern Europe there in West Berlin, it was at the headquarters of the Investigative League of Freedom Loving Jurists. The day before I got to their headquarters, their chairman had been kidnapped. When I got there guards with submachine guns were all around the area, because this was a little enclave bordered on three sides by East Berlin. It was a eerie feeling talking in this kind of surroundings, but when I met Ernst Reuter, he was still driving the autobahn from West Berlin to Bonn, and I asked him, "Why do you do this when there is so much danger that you might be kidnapped by the Communists?" I will never forget his reply. He said, "A right that you have that you do not exercise is no longer a right." That was his feeling about how you deal with things. Incidentally he insisted to me that Norman Thomas was the bravest man he ever met. Norman laughed when I told him that. He thought that Ernst Reuter was that!

*Q: We in the government would not have driven that [autobahn]. We were under instruction to take the train. On the other hand, people like Dave Saposs and I both went to the July 1952 ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) meeting in Berlin. Dave would not take the train, because he was born in Russia. If he had ever had to show*

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*his passport, it would have been dangerous for him, but I took the train and we met in West Berlin, because there was no danger, since I had an American passport showing that I was born in the US. Terribly dangerous times there. It was really touch and go.*

FLEISCHMAN: While I was in Berlin, I took one of the Army buses to East Berlin to the Soviet War Memorial. It was very interesting.

*Q: At that time you could take the subway. Couldn't you?*

FLEISCHMAN: Yes

*Q: I took the subway.*

FLEISCHMAN: Yes, but I was with a bus, and one of the pictures that I still have is a snapshot of me taking a picture of a Volpo, Volkspolizei [People's Policeman], and he was taking a picture of me.

*Q: Well, you came back, and that stuff that you did was published, as I recall?*

FLEISCHMAN: Yes. The AFL Federationist did a big article based on my scripts on the Soviet slave empire.

*Q: Didn't the "Free Trade Union News" carry a lot of stuff?*

FLEISCHMAN: Oh sure! Yes. A lot of them did. Then when I came back home, I discovered that I was in a little trouble. The trouble was something I would never have expected to happen. I had written a script for a Labor Day broadcast, which started and wound up with the song "Solidarity Forever." I was not very proud of the script, because it talked too much about labor-management harmony. It wasn't one of my better scripts, I felt, but a GI hearing it in Korea decided that this was a Communist program and wrote to his Congressman about this Communist program on the Voice of America. His Congressman got in touch with [Senator] Joe McCarthy and, lo and behold!, McCarthy

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at that time — This was the beginning of 1953 — was carrying on a vendetta against the State Department and the Voice of America. He was investigating the Voice, so I was scheduled to be called before the McCarthy Committee.

*Q: This would have been the time that he sent Cohn and Schine to Europe?*

FLEISCHMAN: No, Cohn and Schine were back from Europe [and were in] Washington, DC. One of the Voice people who was a witness at the hearings in New York heard Cohn talking to Schine about “when are we going to do that 'Solidarity Forever' thing.” He came back and told me and also told the Chief of the Voice, — I think his name was Morton, a Madison Avenue advertising character. — who got very scared and worried about this and they all asked, “What can we do?” So Liston Oak and I got in touch with a number of labor leaders, and we got statements from George Meany, Walter Reuther, David Dubinsky, Jacob Potofsky, and Jim Carey, all of them testifying that “Solidarity Forever” is a good old American labor song written before there was a Communist Party and that they used it all the time at there union conventions, and so on. It so happened that they hadn't played music at their recent conventions, but they did from then on. They started playing it. And I had these statements and that was a bit reassuring to the Voice but not enough. And again Nelson Frank came up to the office, and I told him what was happening. He got in touch with Freddy Woltman himself. I got in touch with the columnist Victor Riesel, who was writing for the Post at that time.

*Q: The Daily Mirror or the Post?*

FLEISCHMAN: I'm not sure at this point which one it was. [I also got in touch] with Victor Lasky, whom I had known as Abe Lasky, when he was a young Socialist, but he was now a far-rightist. Nevertheless, each of them said. . . — and told McCarthy or his staff. I don't know whether they said it directly. — They said that if I was called before the Committee, they would denounce the Committee, because, while they didn't agree with my political views, they knew that I was a strong anti-Communist.

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*Q: And it would not serve the purposes of the U. S. Government to have you criticized for being pro-labor. . .*

FLEISCHMAN: Right. Well, I'm not sure why, but I wasn't called before the Committee. But in a sense, McCarthy was successful, because in the spring of 1953, three things happened to me: I was praised very much for my work; I was promoted; and I was fired. What happened was that McCarthy's activities succeeded in cutting the Voice's budget by about 25 percent, and I didn't have any seniority, because I had only been there three years.

*Q: You didn't have what we called "status" as a government employee.*

FLEISCHMAN: Right. So that's the story of what happened there. There is a follow up to that because I then had to look again for other jobs, and I heard about the job at the American Jewish Committee as Director of its National Labor Service, which for a number of years [dealt with] civil rights with unions. Paul Jacobs was one of those working there. David Sigman was its Director. Harry Shugaar. Several other people worked for it. They had interviewed some 20 or more people for the job by the time that I applied, and the one thing that they were concerned about was whether — because I had been a very active Socialist — the trade union people would be willing to work with me. I talked to Phil Randolph about this. He was President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and Phil wrote letters to a bunch of union presidents and 30 or more union presidents wrote in saying that they would be very happy to work with me. He wrote to George Meany and Meany wrote back to Phil, "Well, I don't think it's appropriate for the president of the AFL to tell a Jewish organization whom they should hire, but I certainly think very highly of Harry Fleischman and his work." This was a useful thing to say.

*Q: A nice way to do it.*

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FLEISCHMAN: Yes, so I was hired by them and then continued working with the trade unions very closely on civil rights and civil liberties issues primarily, but later on also on the issue of crime. I set up a National Alliance for Safer Cities with the unions..

*Q: You worked with them for 30 years or so?*

FLEISCHMAN: 26 years, from 1953 to 1979, when I retired. I had not expected to work for them very long. I thought it would be two or three years, and then I would go to work for some union. This was my intention, but many unions staffers told me that I was very fortunate that I worked for the American Jewish Committee rather than for the unions, because I had a free hand, and I could do things that they wouldn't be allowed to do.

*Q: This is very interesting and probably should be written up by somebody studying the union staff problems, because there are so many cases in which unionists. . . Gus Tyler just told me the other day that the reason he quit his job with my local union of the ILGWU, where he began working just after I left, was that he disagreed with the union policy on the 1936 [US Presidential] campaign. I think he was wrong, and he now thinks he was wrong, but nevertheless, he could not keep his job because of his political views at the time.*

Harry, in the time we have remaining, I would like you to comment on the feeling that you and so many other people with trade union-radical backgrounds have about support given by the US Government covertly and overtly for trade union purposes. It is your view as distinguished from mine, but it is a view held by many people, including highly qualified people like Jack Barbash, that it's not really a good idea for any US Government funds to be used for helping trade union and similar causes covertly.

FLEISCHMAN: I think the important word there is covertly. Now I was strongly in support of aid being given openly and above board to various groups for democratic purposes, and I still take that position. I think that that is perfectly justified, and not merely justified, but desirable.

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*Q: But how do you deal with the issue that the context of such open grants vitiates their purpose, as for example, [would have been the case] in the work done during the Marshall Plan in Europe and even later? Well, let me take it out of that [context and use another]. Last night we all heard the broadcast of Governor Clinton defending himself against these charges in this filthy magazine that he had had sexual relationships with a woman, and he answered to the extent that he wanted to answer, and then raised an important question. [Clinton said], "By raising this question, you are avoiding the practical and relevant issues about the relationship of my candidacy to the subjects I am raising, the real political issues." I say to you that there is a parallel situation in what we are discussing here, because if you give the Communists an opportunity to say, "All these labor programs are due to the American capitalist Government's support, which shows you that there is something wrong, that the purpose of all this is to destroy Socialist or good people's ethics," then you are giving the Communists an opportunity to change the battlefield from one of the relative justice of their cause, as against that of the democratic cause, to the question of where the money comes from, which is irrelevant, provided there are no conditions placed on its use.*

FLEISCHMAN: Now, you see, you have made a couple of points there. By saying "provided there are no conditions set to it," and you have no assurance that conditions [have been not placed on the receipt of funds] when they are sub rosa, it's one of the things that you don't know. For instance, the CIA gave money to the National Students' Association, and people accepted that money, and it led to the virtual demise of the organization for a period of time, because of the storm that broke when it was discovered what they had done. Now there is a big problem when you take [as your model] a wartime situation, and you talk about aid to the underground. Whether the aid to the underground is covert or overt really doesn't make too much difference, because the enemy country is going to charge that this [aid] is being given by the foreign government and that it's treasonous, etc. I am not talking about that kind of thing now. I'm talking about other situations. For instance, the kind of thing that happened to Norman Thomas, when he

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and a number of others, Sasha Volman, Pepe Figueres of Costa Rica, Juan Bosch of the Dominican Republic, and a number of others. . . (Pause)

*Q: I just stopped the tape to ask Harry whether he wants this to be recorded, because he is going to be signing a document saying that it will be available to researchers, and he said that he does want it on the record, because it has already been publicized. Go ahead.*

FLEISCHMAN: Well, they formed an organization for the study of democratic trade unionism and politics in Latin America, which was headquartered in Costa Rica. Norman got the first contribution for that from Jacob Kaplan of the Kaplan Fund. I don't remember the amount. I think it was under \$50,000, and that was used to set up the school that taught people from the Latin American countries how to promote democratic political parties and trade unions. It was very valuable. Years later, in 1967, word came out that the additional funds that were given, which amounted to over \$1,000,000, were not from the Kaplan Fund, but that the Kaplan Fund had served as a conduit for the CIA. Norman was dumbfounded to discover that this was the case, because he had heard rumors before, and he had always asked Mr. Kaplan whether the rumors were true and had been given assurances that they weren't true. Well, I felt a little funny also, because when I wrote my biography of Norman Thomas, I took off on a sabbatical from the American Jewish Committee for several months with the Kaplan Fund paying me the same amount of money I would have made at AJC during those months, so I felt badly about that situation too. The Institute for International Labor Research had gone out of existence, but it had \$6,000 to \$7,000 left that Norman used to issue a pamphlet attacking US intervention in the Dominican Republic. He said later, "The CIA didn't get much for its money in this situation." Norman's attitude, which was mine too, was that he favored American material economic support for democratic forces in other countries that are fighting against fascism or dictatorship of any kind and that this was something that should be done.

*Q: With American Government funds?*



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FLEISCHMAN: With American Government funds.

*Q: Like these funds now being allocated [through the National Endowment for Democracy] to the Republican Party, the Democratic Party and all these institutions?*

FLEISCHMAN: Yes, even that. He had no objection to that kind of thing, but it had to be overt. Actually, when I wrote the biography [of Norman Thomas], these were among the questions that I asked him, and I wrote about that, and his answers, to it at that time.

*Q: But how do you deal with the problem about the context of this situation in which, say during the Marshall Plan period and before and after that, the identification of the American Government with the money allocated for that purpose is used to defeat the purposes of the allocation?*

FLEISCHMAN: Well, one answer to that is the fact that the Marshall Plan initially was offered not just to certain countries but to all of them, and in fact Czechoslovakia and Poland accepted it, until forced by the Soviet Union to rescind their acceptance.

*Q: But now you are talking about open funds that were available in the Marshall Plan. I'm talking about anti-Communist propaganda, which from my point of view was totally appropriate for the US Government to support [covertly], and which would have had a negative effect if it had been [identified] as an American [Government] propaganda device.*

FLEISCHMAN: I think you are being a little naive now. Certainly all of that was known by the Communists, and it was attacked as being covert. I don't think you gained anything by making it covert. I think that if it had been done openly, and we had said, "Sure, we are going to support democratic forces," then I think it would have had at least as good a chance of being accepted, as what you say could only have been done covertly.

*Q: This is a real difference.*

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FLEISCHMAN: Yes, this is a real difference, and I don't think that we will come to a meeting of the minds.

*Q: However, it was not effective for the Communists to claim that this was obviously a US Government effort, as it was later on, [when they were] able to point to the fact that it was [a US Government effort] and that people who had been involved in it [described it] as such. So I disagree with it getting out, but I don't disagree with it being done.*

FLEISCHMAN: What I am saying is that the very bad results that came later should have been anticipated and are part of what happens when you use the covert [approach], because eventually these things do get out.

*Q: But you don't have the slightest idea, nor do I, how many good things happened that didn't get out, and would not [otherwise] have come about.*

FLEISCHMAN: That's possible. I can't deny that. I can't answer that. There is no way of telling.

*Q: In justice to your point of view, I felt I wanted to get that view on the record at some point. As I told you, we will be supplying this [interview] to the people doing both the Labor Diplomacy Oral History Project and the people doing interviews about USIA. Anything else about the USIA work that you want to comment on?*

FLEISCHMAN: The only thing that I would like to comment on is that I think that they did a remarkable job, when I was there, 1950 to 1953, not only in terms of the Voice, but also in their written materials from USIA. I saw some of the magazines that USIA printed, and they were of very high quality and very effective because again they tried to give a balanced portrayal of the United States, and what the United States was doing.

*Q: One of the best of those magazines was the one that Jack Sloan put out in India. It was absolutely superb.*

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FLEISCHMAN: Yes, and also there was one that Nathan Glick put out for Russia. It was called "America." He did some excellent work. In fact one interesting thing that happened was that when McCarthy was going after the Voice, Nat and I wrote an article, "Is Senator Joseph McCarthy a Secret Communist," and we showed, I think pretty conclusively, on the basis of McCarthy's own theory that he must have been a Communist. But even more, because. . .

*Q: Where did that appear?*

FLEISCHMAN: I'll tell you in a second. Let me develop it a little bit. . . .because what he said to Jimmy Wechsler, for instance, the editor of the New York Post, that if you are a Communist, you will play the part of an anti-Communist, and that proves that you are a Communist. Well, for Joe McCarthy we had some more things to show. For instance, in the primary in the Republican Party where he first got nominated, it was the votes of the Communists of the Wisconsin CIO that put him over the top against Robert La Follette, Jr., and when he was asked about Communists supporting him, his answer was, "Well, they have a right to vote, haven't they?" These are the things that he said. So, on the basis of that and his later record in which he was attacking as Communists people who were liberals, who were actually anti-Communists, he was thus providing cover for the real Communists.

*Q: Well, I told you that I am writing an article for Gus Tyler on that subject, but I think [McCarthy's pattern of behavior] was just an opportunistic effort to gain political power.*

FLEISCHMAN: You asked me where did the article appear. Since both Nat and I were still on the Government payroll, we could not sign our names to it, but Arnold Beichman did some slight revision of it, and it was printed in the AFL News Reporter in 1953.

*Q: Oh, that's interesting.*

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FLEISCHMAN: I still have a copy of it.

*Q: Can you send me a xerox copy of it?*

FLEISCHMAN: If I can find it, I will.

*Q: I hope you are getting your papers in order, so that they will be available for research people.*

FLEISCHMAN: I have given much of it already to the Tamiment Library and I plan to give them the rest of it, although I still may write my own memoirs. I don't know.

*Q: Where is the Tamiment Library located?*

FLEISCHMAN: That's at the New York University library.

*Q: Available to students obviously?*

FLEISCHMAN: Oh, sure.

*Q: Okay, Harry, [do you have] anything else to [say or] wisdom to give us relevant to the subject that we are covering?*

FLEISCHMAN: Thank you for the opportunity, and I want a copy.

*Q: Thank you. Yes, you'll get a copy if we ever get the money to transcribe it which we hope we'll get. Thank you.*

End of interview